



# San Diego City Attorney **CASEY GWINN**

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **IT IS A GO ! COMMUNITY CELEBRATES! AMERICA'S MOST INNOVATIVE JUSTICE CENTER FOR FAMILIES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

*San Diego City Council approves the creation of the San Diego Family Justice Center*

**San Diego, CA**--A unanimous City Council approved the creation of America's most innovative justice center for families of domestic violence. The *San Diego Family Justice Center* will be the first facility in the nation to house, in one location, the entire Domestic Violence Units of the Police Department and the City Attorney's Office, while also housing other experts and community advocates such as forensic medical professionals, prevention specialists, probation officers, etc. The *San Diego Family Justice Center* is the vision of San Diego City Attorney Casey Gwinn and San Diego Police Chief David Bejarano. "This is the most exciting initiative I have worked on in the last five years," said City Attorney Gwinn. "It will make a difference in the lives of countless victims and their children. For the first time, the criminal justice community will have the opportunity to offer a wide range of services and tap the expertise of many professionals from a single location. The country will be watching us."

Today, the City Council approved the financial plan which launches the first phase of the *San Diego Family Justice Center*. The ultimate dream is a permanent site. Initially, the Center will be located in downtown San Diego at 707 Broadway, near the courthouse and public transportation. The doors of the *San Diego Family Justice Center* will open July, 2002. Three floors will be leased for the next five years and will bring nearly 100 domestic violence professionals under one roof. The first two years of operation will cost close to \$2-million and will be funded with federal monies called "community development block grants" which the City Council approved today. But it was The California Endowment's \$500,000 challenge grant which gave

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the Center a jump start last month. Today, San Diego Verizon Wireless also accepted that challenge and contributed \$30,000 towards the *San Diego Family Justice Center*. “Our company has a strong commitment and a long history in supporting domestic violence awareness and prevention efforts. Verizon Wireless recognizes the importance of providing financial resources to organizations that directly serve victims of family violence,” said Cynthia Yankovich, Verizon Wireless Manager.

Currently, the judicial process makes it difficult for victims to seek help and unintentionally wears them down. Victims are required to travel from location to location to seek services which are scattered throughout the City and County. The *San Diego Family Justice Center* promises to be one of the most significant initiatives to help domestic violence victims in this region in the past 20 years. “We plan to dramatically improve the quality of police investigation, increase convictions and aggressively go after repeat offenders,” said Police Chief Bejarano. “We hope this sends a very clear message to batterers—don’t abuse your family. Domestic violence is a crime and we plan to do whatever it takes to break the vicious cycle of violence within the family.”

In the first phase, the *San Diego Family Justice Center* will include a forensic medical unit which will be staffed by professionals who are trained to document and evaluate injuries of victims. Twenty five percent of all domestic violence victims suffer injuries. “No where in the country is there a medical-legal partnership like what we have in San Diego. This partnership will mobilize an army of professionals to help victims of domestic violence and their children,” said Dr. George McClane. “Domestic violence is a life-threatening but curable disease and the *San Diego Family Justice Center* is good medicine for San Diego.”

Within five years, the *San Diego Family Justice Center* will expand and offer comprehensive medical and legal services, counseling to victims and children, links to Juvenile, Family and Criminal Court, as well as

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access to on-site professionals such as child protective service workers, probation, parole, advocates and the Kids in Court program. It will consolidate efforts and expertise in order to provide more services, more safety and more justice to victims and their children. “The San Diego Family Justice Center will allow us to create an optimal, multi-disciplinary response for victims of domestic violence and improve victim services,” said Dr. Cindy Kuelbs, President of the San Diego Domestic Violence Council.

More than 100 supporters of the *San Diego Family Justice Center* attended today’s City Council meeting and witnessed the council’s historic vote. Immediately, afterwards, a community celebration was held at the future home of the *San Diego Family Justice Center* where City Attorney Casey Gwinn and San Diego Police Chief David Bejarano held a news conference to thank the Mayor and City Council and Corporate and Community supporters. In addition, Gwinn and Bejarano signed a ceremonial agreement that begins the renovations at 707 Broadway. The landlord of 707 Broadway has been working with the City for the last six months to make this project happen. Chris McKellar CEO of California Traditions, Inc., agreed to a competitive lease and has helped direct the space planning effort to facilitate an efficient and functional floor plans. “I’m really gratified to be a part of this very special project. Before Casey approached me with his idea, I had never understood the gravity of the problem,” said McKellar. Besides delivering a visionary solution, 40 police officers will be a part of the Center, making our building the safest in all of downtown!”

The goal of the *San Diego Family Justice Center* is to reduce domestic violence incidents, recidivism and homicides. Ultimately, the vision is for San Diego to be the first large city jurisdiction in America to see domestic violence homicides eliminated. Year-round fund raising will be essential for the *San Diego Family Justice Center* to succeed and expand services. Community outreach efforts are being planned, and the public is invited to participate. For more information visit the following website: [www.sandiegodvunit.org](http://www.sandiegodvunit.org).

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